

Fact Sheet

AB 2129 (Beall)

Alcohol and Substance Abuse Screening and Brief Intervention Program

Protecting Babies

PROBLEM

Prenatal exposure to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs can severely damage the development, structure, and functioning of the fetal brain. About 1 in 12 pregnant women nationwide reported consuming alcohol and about 1 in 30 pregnant women said they had engaged in binge drinking according to the US Center for Disease Control. More than any other drug, alcohol is most commonly used by pregnant women. As a result, fetal alcohol syndrome is one of the leading known preventable causes of birth defects and developmental disabilities.

In 2005, nearly half of the births nationwide were unplanned. Therefore, many women may unknowingly expose their unborn babies to alcohol's harmful side effects before they realize they are pregnant. Researchers found that there is no known safe time or amount of alcohol for women to drink while pregnant.

THIS BILL

Assembly Bill (AB) 2129 would require the State Department of Public Health, no later than January 1, 2010, to develop, coordinate, and oversee the implementation of a pilot program for the universal screening, assessment, referral, and treatment of pregnant women and women of childbearing age who are suffering from alcohol and drug abuse.

The bill sets up a voluntary-participation program for counties and requires the California State Department of Public Health to provide assistance and institute a best practices-based model for the screening and treatment of drug and alcohol

SUMMARY

Effective prevention and intervention programs and screenings can reduce the needless human suffering

caused by drugs and alcohol. In addition, these programs will reduce the costs of medical/dental care, the foster care system, education, and prisons that are traceable to the affects of prenatal substance exposure on the child later in life.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the cost efficacy of an approach that combines universal screening, brief intervention, and treatment.

There are currently a number of successful methodologies in use to identify and help pregnant women who are suffering from alcohol and drug abuse. Many methodologies are non-intrusive, take less than one minute to perform and they can easily be integrated into the initial prenatal visit and used for follow-up screening through the pregnancy.

With no State program, some counties have implemented their own prenatal screening and brief interventions programs at their own expense.

An evaluation of California counties using a program called "4P's Plus" intervention resulted in a sharp decline in rates of substance abuse use during pregnancy and low birth rates.

San Bernardino County significantly reduced low birth weight births by 18% over three years among women whose physicians were providing screening and brief interventions compared to women whose physicians were not providing these services.

Despite the evidence of their usefulness, screenings and brief interventions for alcohol-related problems have not yet been widely implemented in primary care settings, emergency rooms, state licensed facilities and clinics. SB 2129 would allow more counties to provide these critical screenings and brief interventions to help expectant mothers give birth to healthy babies.

STATUS/VOTES

SUPPORT

OPPOSITION

Staff Contact: Sunshine Borelli (408) 282-8920